Introduction to the Private School Universe Survey (PSS)

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Title Slide: Introduction to the Private School Universe Survey (PSS)

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This module introduces users to the Private School Universe Survey, or PSS for short. It provides users with basic information about the study's data collection cycle, target population, data collection methods and sources, universe, and dual frame.

This module also provides a broad overview of the topics for which data are available for analysis to help you answer the fundamental question: "Are PSS data for me?" The subsequent PSS training modules contained within this system will discuss some of these topics in greater detail and address questions about how to effectively use the dataset for your analytic purposes. Though a variety of historical PSS data are available for analysis, these modules focus on those of 2011. Details regarding how to access earlier administrations of PSS are discussed in subsequent PSS modules.

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PSS is designed to generate biennial data on the total number of private schools, students, and teachers, as well as to build a universe of private schools to serve as a sampling frame of private schools for NCES sample surveys.

The Private School Survey produces data similar to that of the NCES Common Core of Data (or CCD) for the public schools. The data are useful for a variety of policy- and research-relevant issues, such as the growth of religiously-affiliated schools, the length of the school year, the number of private high school graduates, and the number of private school students and teachers.

The PSS data were first collected in the 1989–1990 school year, with data collections every two years since.

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The target population for PSS is all schools located in the 50 states and the District of Columbia, that: Are not supported primarily by public funds; provide classroom instruction for one or more of grades kindergarten through 12th grade, or comparable ungraded levels; and, have one or more teachers.

Organizations or institutions that provide support for home schooling, but do not provide classroom instruction, are not included.

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The 2011–12 PSS instrument consisted of a single school questionnaire designed to be filled out by school administrators and can be accessed by clicking the corresponding underlined screen text. Though these training modules will focus exclusively on the 2011-2012 PSS, all of the PSS data collection instruments can be accessed by clicking on the referenced underlined text and then clicking on "Data Tools."

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Some of the data collected for the 2011-12 school year for each school included grade, race/ethnicity and sex, number of high school graduates from the previous year, number of teachers, program emphasis, and school religious orientation or affiliation.

It also included the school's association membership, existence and type of kindergarten program offered, number of days in the school year and length of the school day, and whether the school has a library media center.

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Unlike most other NCES studies, PSS is a universe study because it attempts to survey every private school in the United States every two years. Originally developed for the 1989-1990 survey, the NCES universe list frame is updated using a dual frame approach prior to each administration of the survey. The universe list frame used in the previous PSS is first updated by matching it with lists provided by nationwide private school associations, state departments of education, and other national private school guides and sources. The list frame is then supplemented by additional private schools identified using local administrative data and other sources from a sample of geographic areas from around the country. A more detailed description of the PSS can be found by clicking on the underlined text "Sample Design" and referring to the PSS chapter.

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The list-building component was the primary means for improving coverage of private schools. The basis for the 2011–2012 PSS list frame was the private schools from the 2009–2010 PSS. In order to provide coverage of private schools founded since 2009 and to improve coverage of private schools existing in 2009, NCES solicited membership lists from 31 private school associations and religious denominations. Twenty eight lists were received and processed. The departments of education from 50 states and the District of Columbia provided lists of private schools. Additional private schools that contacted NCES to be included in PSS were added as list frame cases.

In 2011, a separate list-building operation, the Early Childhood Operation, was conducted to identify schools for which kindergarten was the highest grade (also called kindergarten-terminal or k-terminal schools). Requests for lists of programs that might include a kindergarten were made to sources other than state departments of education, in all 50 states and the District of Columbia, including state departments of health or recreation; state child care licensing agencies; and child care referral agencies.

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To identify private schools that may have been overlooked in the list-building component, a group of geographic areas was selected to be searched for potentially uncounted private schools. Potential new schools were discovered by using such sources as yellow pages, local Catholic dioceses, local education agencies, and local government offices.

Schools on private school association membership lists, the state lists, the early childhood lists, and the area frame were compared to the base list, and any school that did not match a school on the base list was added to the universe list.

In addition, the selection of the geographic areas introduces a probabilistic element to the PSS, which is accounted for by sampling weights for the area frame cases. It is important to note that analysts will need to use sampling weights to account for the probabilistic nature of the area frame and the nonresponse adjustment. More information regarding sampling weights can be accessed within the module titled, 'PSS Weights, Variance, and Missing Data.'

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This module has provided an introduction to PSS. It has provided basic information about the data collection cycle, target population, data collection methods and sources, universe, and dual frame. This module has also highlighted the topics for which data are available for analysis. Important resources that have been provided throughout the module are summarized in this slide along with the module's objectives for your reference. You may now proceed to the next module or click the exit button to return to the landing page.